**Chapter 155: Do (2)**

The early morning carriage ride made my stomach churn.

"Phew..."

I opened the curtained window and took a deep breath.

"Temple carriage, pass!"

With the guards' strong voice, the carriage entered the temple grounds.

I quickly grew bored of watching the scenery pass by and turned my gaze elsewhere.

"Paw?"

Nuer was sucking on a pacifier, leaning against my knees and lying on the cushioned seat of the carriage.

"I'm going crazy..."

I looked at Nate Elin, who sighed as she stared at her.

"Do you know her?"

"Well, we've met a few times. She had a lot of impulsive and radical ideas, and she often caused accidents, but she was skilled enough to back it up."

"Ta-ta-ta..."

"I can't believe she would end up like this. What happened?"

Nate Elin seemed curious about the details, but I was too lazy to explain everything.

"Well, a lot of things happened. It's too complicated to start from the beginning."

"...Yeah, it seems like a lot happened."

She nodded and I asked her,

"Why did Serif ask for me?"

Serif had persistently asked me to visit the temple, but she had never sent her personal guard before.

I had a feeling something important must have happened.

As expected, Nate Elin's expression changed at my question.

Her usual arrogant and haughty expression was replaced by one of genuine worry and sadness.

"Don't tell anyone what I'm about to say. Few people in the Temple of Earth Mother know about this."

"Yes."

"Think carefully before you speak."

"...Yes."

She took a deep breath and opened her mouth.

"Actually, Serif has been unconscious for the past few days."

"What?!"

"Shh!"

I was startled by the news that the saint had been unconscious for days, and Nate Elin quickly gestured for me to be quiet.

"Is that true?"

I asked in a hushed voice, and she nodded with a worried expression.

"I don't know the exact reason. Serif doesn't have any underlying health conditions. However, she suddenly collapsed when a low-ranking priest named Hitolis was reporting to her."

The sudden mention of the name made my head spin.

"Hitolis? Do you mean the catgirl Hitolis?"

"Yes. Wasn't she one of your party members? Don't worry, she didn't do anything to harm Serif."

That was a relief, but...

"But the strange thing is, as soon as Serif regained consciousness, she asked for you."

"Me?"

That was completely unexpected.

'She was unconscious, and then she asked for me?'

Nate Elin looked at me with a guarded expression.

"Yes. Even when she was unconscious and I personally wiped her body with a holy water cloth every night and changed her into soft pajamas, she kept mumbling your name..."

I shuddered at the detailed explanation.

"You...could it be..."

Nate Elin looked at me as if she felt threatened by the possibility of losing the attention of someone she admired.

I avoided her gaze and just then, we arrived.

*Bang, bang.*

"We've arrived, Paladin."

The coachman announced our arrival at the temple.

"Go on."

"Yes."

Nate Elin got off the carriage first.

I followed her, carrying Nuer, into the temple building.

"Where are we going?"

This was a place I had never been before. It wasn't the temple library or the place where blessings and curses were checked. It was a strange and unfamiliar place.

And it felt strangely damp and gloomy, unlike the warm and cozy image of the temple.

"This is the confessional. Or the place where people confess their sins to Earth Mother."

"Confession?"

"It's where people who have committed great sins confess their sins to Earth Mother."

"I know that. But why am I here?"

"I don't know either. I’m just following Serif's orders."

Creak.

Nate Elin opened the door to the secluded confessional room in the temple without a word.

"Go in. Give her to me."

"...."

I hesitated for a moment, trying to read Nate Elin's expression before handing Nuer to her.

"Waah!"

"There, there. Be a good girl, and I'll buy you some candy."

"Dyaah!"

"..."

Leaving behind Nuer, who was grinning, and Nate Elin, who looked exasperated, I stepped into the confessional.

Thud!

The door closed behind me, and the dim candlelight illuminated the narrow confessional.

I saw a chair to sit on, a wall separating me from the person on the other side, and a curtain.

There was a small hole in the wall, just big enough for my hand to fit through.

"It's been a while, Balkan."

A voice came from the other side of the wall.

It was Serif's voice, soft and hesitant, calling my name, a different tone than Diana's.

Serif Adeline, the white cat-like woman and the saint of the Earth Mother Church.

She was calling my name from the confessional.

"How have you been?"

Serif's voice, though unseen behind the wall, asked after my well-being.

-Click.

Balkan leaned his axe against the wall and sat down on the chair provided, replying to Serif.

"I'm fine. Thanks to the miracle you bestowed upon me, I was able to survive the harsh cold of the 12th floor."

Thanks to the warmth miracle she had given me, I had been able to maintain my composure in the harsh cold of the 12th floor.

"Oh, I'm glad I could help."

Serif's voice, heard through the wall, involuntarily turned into a coquettish giggle.

It always made her happy to know that she had helped someone. But the man on the other side of the wall, or rather, the man behind the wall, was special.

-Thump, thump, thump!

Serif's white cat tail swayed wildly, reflecting her emotions.

Balkan cautiously asked, feeling the tail's breeze through the small hole in the wall.

"Are you feeling better? I heard you were sick for a few days."

"Oh, hehe. Thank you for your concern. I'm not sick or anything, so don't worry too much."

After exchanging some pleasantries, Serif hesitated before speaking.

"The reason I called you here, Balkan, is because I heard you were attacked by succubi in the Labyrinth."

In fact, that wasn't the only reason.

She had heard from the low-ranking priest, Hitolis, about all the lewd things Balkan had done in the Labyrinth.

Things that were too embarrassing and far from the teachings of Earth Mother to mention.

...At the same time, they were things that, as a woman, made her body tingle with desire and excitement.

She wanted to confront him about these things, but she knew her place.

'If I ask him about those things, it's over.'

She could already imagine him yelling at her, calling her names, slapping her, and then leaving.

*Slap!*

She imagined him slapping her and then leaving.

Thump, thump, thump!

Her tail thrashed against the floor as she shook her head, trying to calm herself down.

"Yes, the succubi almost possessed my party members, but we managed to overcome them."

'No way. Balkan must have done it on his own.'

Serif nodded to herself.

Of course. How could noble Balkan engage in such lewd acts like group sex and footjobs? It was impossible.

It must have been those evil demons who had possessed his party members and forced them to do such things.

"That's a relief. But I also heard you were cursed with the terrible curse of a demon."

"Is it that terrible?"

"Yes. Demons, including succubi, are wicked and disgusting creatures that defile the word of Earth Mother...Oh."

Serif quickly added, realizing her slip-up.

"I didn't mean to insult you, Balkan! You're just a victim of the curse!"

Serif, who had just cursed the demons in a surprisingly cold voice, hurriedly added these words.

Balkan could almost visualize the white cat's flustered expression through the wall and chuckled bitterly.

"I'm fine."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. What I meant was that I wanted to help you get rid of the curse as soon as possible."

"..."

Balkan was silent for a moment.

He could tell from Serif's voice that she was genuinely worried about him, but removing the curse was a different matter.

"If you're worried about the cost, you can use the curse removal coupon I gave you last time."

He did have a curse removal coupon that came with the [Serif Free Pass].

"It's not about the cost. It's just that the situation is a bit complicated right now. Besides, the curse is actually quite useful if I manage it well."

The demon's curse did have several advantages. It was worth keeping.

Serif hesitated, sensing Balkan's firm resolve.

It was rare for a priest to actively encourage someone to remove a curse, even a demon's curse.

Usually, it was up to the adventurer to decide what to do with the blessings and curses they acquired.

But Serif was worried.

"But, Balkan. You know the risks of a demon's curse, right?"

A demon's curse.

From the perspective of a follower of the Earth Mother Church such a curse, if managed, could be as powerful as a blessing.

However, managing the risks of a demon's curse was impossible for most people.

"You'll be constantly driven by lust, unable to think of anything but sex. In the worst case, you might even develop sexual desires for monsters. You might even become mindless like many of the men who seek our help."

"Yes, I know. That's why I've been taking potions..."

"Potions won't be enough! They might suppress it temporarily, but you can't rely on them forever."

To resist lust, one needed a pure and clean mind, immense patience, and a bit of luck.

Without all these, one would eventually succumb to the demon's curse.

However, Serif also knew something.

She knew that Balkan was different from other men.

"So, if you're going to keep the curse...let's practice."

"Practice?"

"Yes, yes. Everything we're about to do is just practice."

Serif carefully stood up and looked at the small hole in the wall.

She gently touched the hole with her finger.

"To help you, Balkan, resist being controlled by your lust."